# Summer Reading Seminar

## Description of institution and student population

The target audience for this class is incoming freshman. Students at [Grayslake Community School District](http://www.d127.org/Pages/Default.aspx) are largely white and middle class. Currently Grayslake Central is meeting requirements for adequate yearly progress. Additional demographic information can be found in the [School Report Card](http://www.d127.org/Community/Report%20Cards/CGHS%202009%20Report%20Card.pdf). The relatively small enrollment of 1266 students leads to a close-knit and cohesive student body. The mission at Grayslake District 127 is: *Students engage in challenging tasks in which they draw upon personal strengths and diverse experiences, create meaningful connections, and develop innovative problem solving skills. With the confidence and character gained from these experiences, students pursue their individual passions and participate responsibly and effectively in their communities*. This mission is taken seriously by staff, who have been revising and creating curriculum over the past two years using the [*Understanding by Design*](http://www.amazon.com/Understanding-Design-Expanded-Grant-Wiggins/dp/0131950843/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1279983080&sr=1-1) framework by Grant Wiggins. The culture of District 127 is to prepare students for college and is heavily weighted toward academic preparation, using mainly traditional teaching methods. To that end, it has opened the door to Advanced Placement for more students than previously. They have had much success with this philosophy.

## Course Description

This course is designed to promote summer reading, acquaint students with their peers, and to provide a foundational framework for literary analysis for incoming freshman within a supportive and collaborative atmosphere. Students will interact in an online environment, analyze the readings and learn new technologies to demonstrate their learning.

This course is designed to create a bridge from eighth grade into freshman year. Its aim is to provide continuity to the summer reading to ready students for immediate immersion into their English class on the first day of school. While GCHS currently requires summer reading for all its students, the results have been mixed at least partially due to expectations and assessments being misaligned. Toward that end, the assessments for this course are designed with this question in mind: “Does the proposed evidence enable us to infer a student’s knowledge, skill or understanding” (Wiggins, 2005, p. 150). Further, the faculty’s belief in the value of summer reading is supported by reading researcher Krashen (2004), who writes that reading “five extra books over the summer [equals a] a 3 percentiles gain” (p.9). In addition, since, as noted above, GCHS leans toward a traditional academic curriculum. This course is designed to provide not only support for student learning, but also to serve as an exemplar for staff in the power of embracing online instructional strategies. These strategies will provide ample formative assessment. According to Marzano (2006), formative assessment is a powerful tool for classroom teachers to use to support student achievement, particularly when feedback is frequent and immediate.

## Technology Needs for Participants

* Broadband connection
* Microphone
* Webcam (optional)
* Internet Explorer 7 or higher
* FireFox 3.6 or higher

## Pre-Course Survey

A survey will be administered to students to determine their self-perception as readers, as well as to discern their assessment of their technology skills. The survey was created is called [Summer Reading Survey](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/TXWLFWL).

## Module 3 Objective 1

Given an overview of main literary themes, students will display their ability to identify the theme of Kelly Easton's [*Aftershock*](http://www.amazon.com/Aftershock-Kelly-Easton/dp/1416900535/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1279562512&sr=1-3), according to the rubric’s guidelines, by contributing to the seminar wiki using evidence from the book (<http://www.summerreadingseminar.wikispaces.com>).

## Bloom’s Taxonomy: Comprehension/Analysis/Application

With its emphasis on theme, this objective supports knowledge and comprehension within the schema of Bloom’s Taxonomy. Clearly, students must have a grasp on the story and characters in order to ascertain the main idea; however, this object extends to higher order thinking as well. Since this novel is not a part of the literary canon, and since it is relatively new, students must analyze the story in order to discover the main theme. In so doing, they will find sub-themes throughout the work, so there will be more than once correct answer. Second, they will need to apply what they learn about theme from the slideshow during their analysis and subsequent postings to the wiki.

## Pre-Assessment

Students will take this short pre-assessment survey to gauge what their knowledge of theme in literature. The results of this survey are to be used to determine the degree of instructor guidance that will be needed in the upcoming discussion. It will also be used to decide if a theme questions board is appropriate.

[Pre-Assessment Summer Reading Survey](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5R3SS8V)

## Activity

Theme conveys the message of a story usually by driving a story through conflict and resolution. Students will discuss the theme of *Aftershock* found under the wiki discussion tab of this page. First, they will review this slideshow from Authorstream to better familiarize themselves with the concept of theme in literature (<http://www.authorstream.com>).

## Assessment process

Students will post at least one extended original post to the wiki that identifies a main theme or ancillary theme of the story using evidence from the book and information about theme in literature from the slideshow. In addition, students will respond to any comments to their original post and respond to at least two other posts from other students.

## Tool’s Strengths and Weaknesses: Wikis

A wiki is the assessment tool for this objective, primarily so that the entire class can collaborate on the major and ancillary themes in the book. Further, it will help students to clarify their own understanding of theme as they share their own ideas and respond to others regarding this object. Wikispaces is the recommended wiki platform for this objective because it is ad-free, simple to use and allows more space for users than PBwiki.

Strengths for this application are the ability for users to communicate asynchronously. Since this is a summer reading seminar, it is not expected that everyone will be able to have a fixed meeting time; a wiki allows the flexibility to timeshift. Additionally, since it is so easy to use, an inordinate amount of time to learn how to post and share is unnecessary. Instead, users can begin to collaborate almost immediately. The wiki also acts as an archive for everyone’s contributions and allows learners and the teacher to track progress. Plus, since it allows for the posting of images and video, learning can be geared toward a variety of learning styles. However, a wiki is not without its weaknesses.

A weakness of a wiki, especially if students are adding content to it, is that people cannot edit simultaneously. Sometimes users write a post and discover that since someone else is editing, they are unable to add content. Instructors will need to apprise students of this issue. Further, students who lack facility in writing and keyboarding will find this mode of communication more demanding than a classroom discussion. Written discussion can make assessment more time intensive for a teacher, in that she will have to read through a variety of responses—a task more time-consuming than listening to a classroom discussion. Although students with limited Internet access will find using the wiki inconvenient, the vision for this course is that all students will have nearly ubiquitous access.

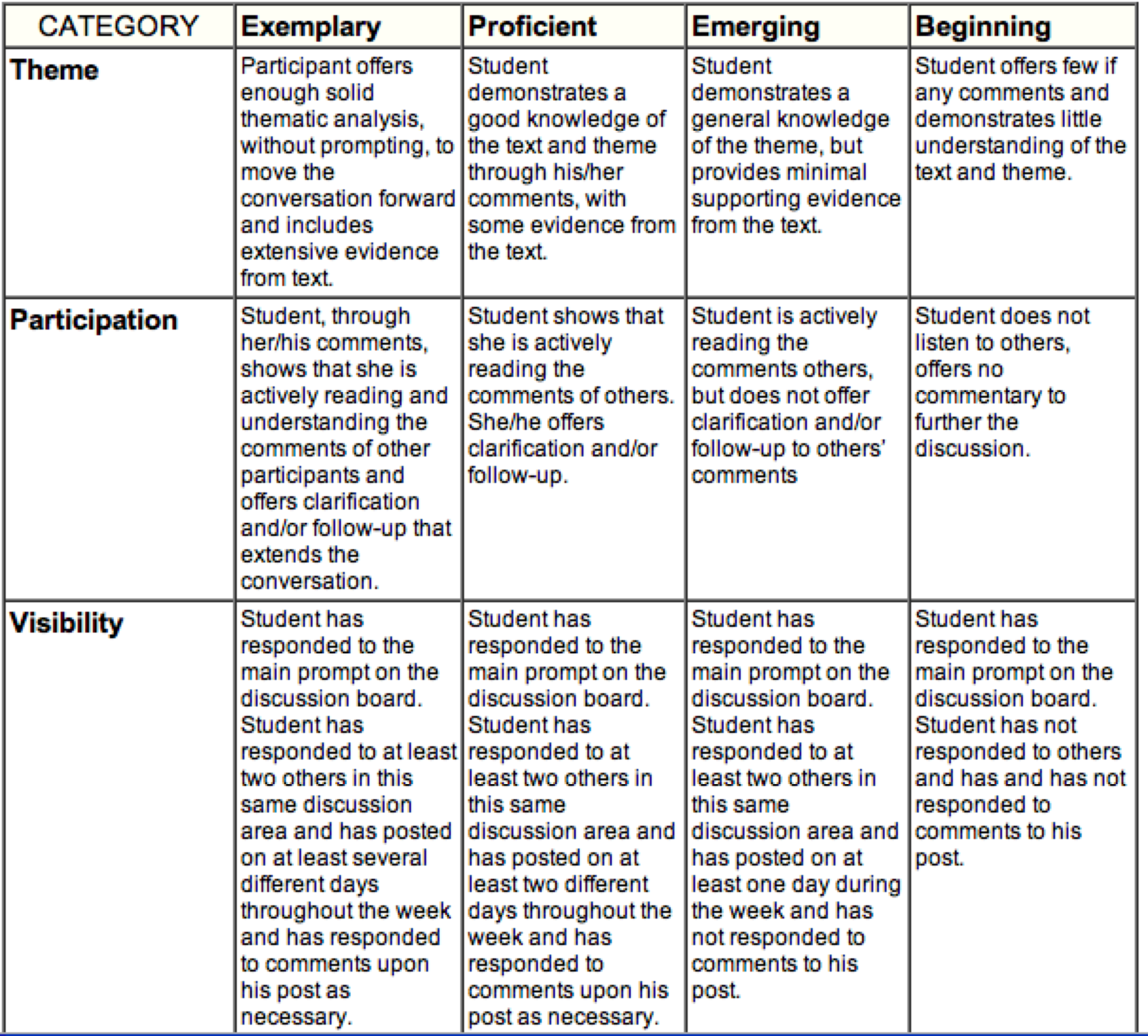
This tool was selected for this appropriate for this class because it acts as an online classroom where everyone’s voice can be heard. It allows for multiple threaded discussions so that participants and posit their own ideas, respond to others and extend the conversation to deeper levels. Thus, it is well suited for the first objective. Finally, it helps students to develop a deeper understanding, in this case of theme, as they are encouraged to develop their own ideas and assimilate the ideas of others.

The table below summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the wiki application.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Strengths*** | ***Weaknesses*** |
| Simple to use | Potentially takes longer to assess than a face-to-face discussion |
| Collaborative | Students who have writing deficits will have difficulty |
| Coordinates everyone’s responses | Students may have limited internet access |
| Asynchronous |  |

## Rubric

Created on Rubistar4Teachers (<http://rubistar4Teachers.org>).



## Plagiarism and diversity of learning styles

This first objective virtually eliminates the danger of plagiarism for several reasons. First, the unit will always be based upon current young adult literature, literature that has not been made into movies. Unlike the literary canon which often has a movie based on the novel, new current young adult literature is print-based, requiring reading and fresh eyes to analyze theme. Second, because this literature is not part of the literary canon, it has not been analyzed in journals by critics, so students will need to identify, analyze and apply theme themselves or as a class-team.

Meanwhile, this assessment tool will allow students who are ordinarily shy in class or reluctant to participate in class discussion to hear their voice as analysis unfolds. Likewise, those students who need to reflect before posing their thoughts to the group will have time to do so. Finally, while it is true that those whose writing skills are better developed will find this as a comfortable means of expression, it is also true that those who need to better develop their writing skills will have continued opportunities to do so in a risk-free environment. That is, they will have the opportunity to improve due to the nature of this formative assessment.

## Module 3 Objective 2

Students will reflect upon their own lives and, during a recorded [Skype](http://www.skype.com/intl/en-us/home) interview with a classmate, will draw at least two parallels between the main theme in *Aftershock* and their own lives and experiences (<http://www.skype.com>).

## Bloom’s Taxonomy: Comprehension/Analysis/Application/Self-Reflection

Like the previous objective, objective 2 requires the comprehension of the text by the student in order to adequately perform this task. However, a student must also be able to analyze the book to apply parallels and differences between themselves and the protagonist. Additionally, the act of self-reflection and putting themselves into the story or point-of-view of the protagonist pushes students to synthesize their own “story” with that of the character in the book. The act of articulating that self-knowledge with members of their learning team will help to solidify their understanding of themselves and the novel.

## Activity

After a brief overview of [Skype](http://www.skype.com/intl/en-us/home) from the TeacherTube video, students will plan a synchronous recorded discussion based upon how they are similar or different from the protagonist in the novel. They will delve into the question of how their own lives parallel the theme in Aftershock (<http://www.skype.com> and <http://www.teachertube.com>). Students may wish to use a survey mechanism such as [PollEverywhere](http://www.polleverywhere.com/) or [SurveyMonkey](https://www.surveymonkey.com/) to determine what time works best for each of the group members (<http://www.polleverywhere.com> and <http://www.surveymonkey.com>).

## Assessment process

The recorded Skype discussion will be the tool for assessment (<http://www.skype.com>). Since the teacher will not necessarily be able to be a part of each discussion, the recording will serve to provide an overview on the depth of conversation. Depth will be evaluated based upon direct connections to the book, character, plot and theme as they parallel the lives of individual students. Self-reflection will be an integral part of this learning as students make connections between the experiences of the protagonist and their own lives. All students in the small group are expected to contribute their own self-reflections and to question, comment and extend the thoughts of their classmates using personal experiences and direct evidence from the book. The recorded discussion will be posted for teacher review and for other students to review as well. A rubric will be provided.

## Tool’s Strengths and Weaknesses: Skype

Skype is a peer-to-peer tool that allows students to speak with each other over the Internet by using a Voice Over Internet Protocol. Where the wiki is primarily written, Skype is primarily verbal. Besides the objectives of the course, another goal is to create a cohesive group of learners. Skype is another means of advancing toward that goal by giving students the opportunity to synchronously share ideas with each other. As a free tool to talk with others from one computer to the other, it is hard to beat. Additionally, it is available for PC and Mac users. For a small fee, users can be assigned a Skype telephone number and call each other as well. Much like the class list function in Desire2Learn, Skype users can see who is online and available and converse with them. Chat messages may be left and exchanged as well. Its easy of use makes it an excellent choice for online learners, plus the ability to record conversations, such as when responding to a classroom prompt is valuable for the student’s portfolio, as well as for the teacher’s review.

Although its strengths are clear, there are nevertheless some weaknesses. Students will need to download the application and have a microphone and webcam if they wish to see each other. Due to that, students will not be able to use public computers for this objective, plus there might be bandwidth issues with some home connections.

Despite some weaknesses, Skype is an excellent tool for assessing the second objective. Since the second objective requires that students reflect upon the parallels in their own life with that of the protagonist’s, Skype allows users to easily pursue follow-up questions with each other. It allows for a more free-form exploration of ideas and connections than a textual assessment might. Further, it allows verbal learners to exercise one of their strengths—conversation.

The table below summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of Skype.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Strengths*** | ***Weaknesses*** |
| Synchronous real-time discussion | Possible bandwidth issues |
| Multi-platform functionality | Students will not be able to use public computers for this application |
| Voice and video available | Scheduling logistics |
| Free for Skype to Skype | Need for microphone and webcam if video is desired |

## Plagiarism and diversity of learning styles

As with the first objective, the currency of the novel prevents the use of other sources to successfully meet this objective. Next, because a deep response necessitates deep reflection on the part of the student, contributions will be unique to each reader’s experience. This particular assessment lends itself to learners who excel at verbal self-expression and gives them the opportunity to literally share their voice. Further, because students will be in small groups for this activity, everyone will have a chance to be heard, unlike a classroom of 30 students. As a result, those who are intimidated by a large group will feel less pressure in this more intimate setting as they draw connections between their own lives and those of the character in the book and as they listen to the connections of others.

## Module 3 Objective 3

Students will post a minimum of 3 quotes from the book on the class [Wallwisher](http://www.wallwisher.com/) board to begin tracking character development of the protagonist (http://www.wallwisher.com).

## Bloom’s Taxonomy: Comprehension/Analysis/Application/Evaluation

This activity is designed for students to become more aware of character development by mining the book for evidence, that evidence being quotes by the main character. It necessitates comprehension of the plot and main character in order to pull out effective evidence, but also requires the ability to analyze the literature and to apply it to what they know about the character. To a lesser extent this activity also demands the ability to evaluate the best quotes to support their understanding of character development.

## Activity

Students will post selected quotes to the online collaborative “sticky-note” board [Wallwisher](http://www.wallwisher.com/) (http://www.wallwisher.com). These quotes from the book will track Adam's character development. These may be his thoughts or actions. Meanwhile, the teacher will guide thinking by posting to the wall as appropriate. The link for the Summer Reading Seminar Wallwisher board can be found [here](http://www.wallwisher.com/wall/summerreadingseminar).

## Assessment process

Students will continue to delve into the text to substantiate their understanding of the protagonist’s character development. By selecting appropriate quotes, passages or actions from the book students will not only post their own ideas, but also be able to see the ideas of others. By sharing these understandings, students will have the opportunity to develop and share new understandings. As appropriate, the teacher will guide this process by posting questions or gently challenging the sticky-notes on the class board. By its nature, this is an organic process that lends itself to formative assessment.

## Tool’s Strengths and Weaknesses: Wallwisher

Like a wiki, Wallwisher allows multiple contributors to a question or project. It is an online tool available without an install and available on dual platforms. Whereas a wiki is more linear and sequential for users, a Wallwisher is more organic. Although it can be used for a variety of purposes, for this objective it is used to select quotes from the book to track character development. Users can post not only text, but also images to Wallwisher, so when appropriate, students may wish to include images on their post. Learners may also with to post hyperlinks on the board that in some way contribute to the prompt. As a benefit to teachers, posts may be pre-approved and will have the contributor’s name. Its ease of use will prevent time being spent on the tool, so that learners can focus on the assignment and learning. Although this objective relies upon Wallwisher as a means to cite appropriate quotes, it is also an excellent way to collect exit slips for a class to determine what students understood, as well as what they still need clarification upon. In essence, Wallwisher is a high functioning bulletin board, combining text, images and even video links.

Few weaknesses are apparent with the tool itself. Principally, the board can become cluttered and difficult to assimilate if too many posts are added or if users become verbose. Hence, the teacher needs to emphasize the need to be concise. While it is not suited to in-depth discussion, it is an excellent springboard for deeper thinking and conversation.

This tool was chosen for ease of use, as well as its inherent ability to organically illustrate both textual and visual evidence and ideas. It allows both textual and visual learners to contribute in a common area.

The table below summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of Wallwisher.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Strengths*** | ***Weaknesses*** |
| No install, online application | Board can get crowded |
| Multi-platform | Information must be brief |
| Easy to use |  |
| Posters are identifiable |  |
| Posts may be pre-approved |  |

## Plagiarism and diversity of learning styles

Students must be able to identify and share quotes, actions and passages from the book. No online source exists for them to extract the pertinent information from this assignment. Further, the teacher will have access to their profile in order to approve posts, and by now in the summer seminar, will have a sense of the particular student’s writing. This particular assignment supports not only a textual/verbal learning style, but could also become a vehicle for visual learners to express their understanding.

## Module 3 Objective 4

With their group and drawing upon evidence from the book, students will select one of the stops along Adam's journey and locate it using [The Simple Guide Tool](http://simpleguidetool.com/) in order to conduct a live video chat discussing how this stop in his journey contributes to his growth (<http://www.simpleguidetool.com>), according to the rubric’s guidelines. Students will then post the link to share their analysis of this stop with the class as a whole.

## Bloom’s Taxonomy: Comprehension/Analysis/Evaluation

As this novel unfolds, the main character undertakes a literal journey across the country as well as a figurative journey as he experiences his “coming of age.” To demonstrate their understanding of Adam’s literal and figurative growth throughout the journey, students must comprehend the story, analyze his words and actions, and finally evaluate whether various actions have led to growth.

## Activity

Each student will be assigned a group based on time available. The group will be assigned a destination along Adam’s journey. During the live video chat using the Simple Guide Tool, students will discuss how their assigned destination contributed to Adam’s growth (<http://www.simpleguidetool.com>). Following their conversation, students will post a summary of their discussion to the wiki board in Module 3 Objective 4 to share with their classmates.

## Assessment process

This particular formative assessment allows students to discuss character growth with their peers and to literally see various stop points along the journey of the protagonist via Google Earth, which is embedded in the Simple Guide Tool (http://www.simpleguide.com). In addition, this activity allows students to jigsaw their various discussions and share their learning on the class wiki. Further, studies show that using technology collaboratively results in “a modest increase in effect size” (Pitler, 2007 p.141).

## Tool’s Strengths and Weaknesses: Simple Guide Tool

The Simple Guide Tool is probably the most complex assessement tool used for this unit and thus, was chosen to support the last objecive. Using the powerful Google Maps application as a background for setting, this tool allows users to actually see various places around the globe. A live street view is seen while synchronous video chat takes place. The application is free with no installation required. Since it is dual platform, Mac and PC users may participate.

Weaknesses are similar to Skype in that bandwidth might be an issue as well as the need for peripherals such as microphones and webcams. Because students will be identifying towns along Adam’s journey, the might find some towns still unmapped by Google. In that case, students may choose a nearby town to acquire a flavor of the place. This will building a basis for discussing setting later in there English courses.

This tool was chosen to continue building group cohesiveness and for its unique ability for experiences the places that the protagonist has visited. Visual and auditory learners will have the opportunity to work with their strengths using this tool.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***Strengths*** | ***Weaknesses*** |
| Online application, no install required | Bandwidth issues |
| Free | Need for microphone and webcam |
| Live video chat | Not all towns are mapped |
| Building group cohesiveness |  |

## Plagiarism and diversity of learning styles

The continued center-point for this module is the new book Aftershock, a book which is new, relevant to teen readers and due to its currency little online criticism or classroom projects are available online. Thus, students must rely on their own reading, analysis and discussion with their group or the class at large. Meanwhile, this activity allows verbal and visual learners to demonstrate their learning. The GoogleMap portion of the project will help learners to visually grasp the magnitude of the main character’s journey.

## Conclusion

This course is designed to support student learning in an online collaborative environment. Frequent formative assessment activities occur to better align course goals and assessments. However, the academic piece is just one component of this course; the sustained opportunities to collaborate will help students to become part of a synergistic learning team at the very onset of the high school careers. Finally, reading relevant fiction, creating and collaborating online with new tools will create a dynamic environment for learning and discovery.

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